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SPECIAL ISSUE

FIFTH LONDON INTERNATIONAL UFO CONGRESS

THE ITALIAN PAPERS

Once again we are proud to present a special issue of ITUFOR, entirely consisting of the papers presented by CISU members at an international Congress.

This time it was the "**London International Congress**", now in its fifth successful edition which was jointly sponsored by the "**British UFO Research Association**" (BUFORA), the "**Mutual UFO Network**" (MUFON) and the "**International Committee on UFO Research**" (ICUR) on July, 14, 15 and 16, 1989: a unique achievement for international ufology cooperation.

Two papers were presented by Italian ufologists, members of the "**Italian Center for UFO Studies**" (**Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici**):

- **Gian Paolo Grassino** and **Edoardo Russo's** "*Italian UFO-Research in the Eighties*" doesn't merely summarize the main features of Italy's last ten years of UFO research; it also tries to define a new way of meaning ufology and ponders on the ufologists' role in society.
- **Maurizio Verga's** reflections centered on "*Information Quality - the ITACAT Example*", asking pertinent questions about the reliability of even our best data: close encounter reports.

We feel our foreign colleagues who were not present in London may be interested in reading the full texts, so here we are soon on the heels of ITUFOR-10.

ITALIAN UFO RESEARCH IN THE EIGHTIES

A Review of Sightings, Activities and Reflections

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

some of you may remember the 1979 London Congress, held by BUFORA here in London.

A paper was presented about Italian ufology and the great Italian UFO wave of 1978 in particular.

Ten years have elapsed since then, and we'll try to give you a picture of that decade. Of course it would be impossible to completely review the Italian UFO situation of the last ten years in such a brief paper, as well as it would be impossible to review the British one.

On the other side, this won't be just a summary of the best UFO reports or activities, but will also include some reflections which we hope you may find of interest. They represent an Italian contribute to the current debate on ufology, on its scope and limits.

Such presentation will thus be divided in three parts: in the first one, we will review the UFO situation in Italy; in the second one we'll present some general observations coming from our own national experience; in the third one, a specific research project and its results will be detailed.

• ITALIAN UFOLOGY TODAY

As a first step, let's briefly review the state-of-the-art of Italian ufology.

As you may know, in the '70s there were literally hundreds of small, local UFO groups in Italy. By the end of that decade, however, most of them had either given up or had become local branches of the only national organization: the Centro Ufologico Nazionale (C.U.N.), whose monthly journal "Notiziario UFO" was nationally distributed in the newsstands between 1978 and 1980 and had about 8,000 readers.

The lack of sightings since 1980 took Italian ufology to quite a crisis: the number of active ufologists was reduced to about 100. The journal virtually stopped publications (only four issues were published in the following four years). In such a critical situation there were opposing views about what research priorities should be.

Strong internal polemics took to a split in late 1985: a few members of CUN remained with the old group, while most of the active members left and formed a new organization: the Italian Center for UFO Studies (Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici, C.I.S.U.), which succeeded in re-organizing a wealthy Italian ufology.

In four years of existence, the new center has shown a great activity, as opposed as CUN virtual disappearance (only three more issues of "Notiziario UFO" have been published as yet). Indeed all reserch projects already in progress were continued by CISU members.

Our Center presently has 200 members in nearly all regions, and the "active core" is formed by about 40 persons. The main activities are field investigation, data collection and filing.

A major emphasis has been placed upon circulating information, in two different forms:

1) an "open" data bank: that is all filed documents (from newscippings to investigation reports) may be received in photocopy by members at a nominal fee;

2) several "specialized" publications:

- a quality journal, "UFO Information Review", issued twice per year with articles on major events and discussions; it is the only UFO journal presently distributed nationally through a network of bookstores and newsstands;

- a quarterly bulletin to associates, detailing research projects, activities in progress, received/available documents, information on latest events, and so on;

- a quarterly "case histories" newsletter, reporting field investigations by members;

- a bimonthly "newsclipping service";

- occasional monographs on specific subjects (eg. a catalogue of trace-landing reports; a bibliography of Italian books on UFOs; a theoretical paper on the French "new ufology").

Two "UFO hotlines" are being operated in Turin and Rome for witnesses to call, as well as a UFO Bulletin Board System for telematic-equipped ufologists to exchange data. Indeed a wide computerization of ufology has developed in the last few years: virtually every active ufologist has got a personal computer and uses it for type-writing and filing purposes.

As for research activities, a dozen specialized projects are presently being conducted. The major ones are the following:

- Regional Catalogues and Files of UFO/IFO reports, kept by local members, which helped us to rapidly collect and file as many as 10,000 sighting reports nationwide, often saving old files of former ufologists;

- "ITACAT", that is the national catalog of close encounter reports (about which Maurizio Verga will later detail some data);

- "Project Italy 3", concerning Italian humanoid sightings, which are not only filed and catalogued, but re-investigated whenever possible;

- "Operation Origins", consisting of library search in old newspapers of the early years (1946-1954) from the ghost rockets era to the first great UFO wave in Italy, in order to get a clearer picture of the press coverage.

The center has no corporate opinion, and all kinds of attitudes are represented by CISU members, from sociologists to trace-landing analyzers, the common ground being a scientific approach. A typical and unusual feature of Italian ufology in the last ten years has been that, upon such "common denominator" also the "intellectual" ufologists (and even the skeptical ones!) have accepted to take part in the Center activities and organization.

So it's no surprise that CISU is also interested in sociological studies. We even organized and payed for a national opinion poll on UFOs, by Gallup associates, in 1987. The most notable results were that Italians presently believe in UFOs' existence less than ten years ago

(only one fourth, while they were 34% in 1979); and that as many as 6 percent of adult Italians have seen a UFO, that is an esteemed 3.5 millions unknown witnesses.

A lot of activity is also spent on "public education": conferences, public debates, interviews in newspapers, at the radio and on TV may be numbered by dozens each year. The aim is letting witnesses and would-be ufologists learn of our existence.

• THE OFFICIAL SIDE

Because of the great UFO wave which hit our country in 1978, the Italian Air Force was ordered to create a UFO office in the spring of 1979.

Following ufologists' pressure for releasing data on a military pilot's photographic sighting which took place in 1979 over Treviso, in 1984 the Air Force released some of the photos, telling it was just a toy-balloon.

As the ufologists' pressure followed for obtaining more data, in 1986 a listing was released of all collected reports since 1979. Such a listing was updated twice, thus giving us official statistics on UFO sightings in Italy.

But it was a delusion, because it was soon evident that the Italian military forces have never had any real interest in UFOs. They merely collect and file sighting reports that are forwarded by pilots and police or that are ... read in the press! By analyzing the official data (which contained only some basic information on each sighting) we could determine for sure that some entries in the listing were merely copied from newspapers, without any investigation which would have disclosed quite different information from the witnesses (we did investigate them).

Having received the above-mentioned listings, an Italian "ufologist" recently claimed he was "collaborating" with the Ministry in UFO studies. The truth is that they send it to anybody who ask for it and - more important- they do absolutely nothing to study reports: they merely file them in a cabinet. Please note that we have collected as many as ten times the sightings the Ministry admits for each year from 1980 to 1988.

• UFO/IFO REPORTS

Let's now review what's the situation as of UFO/IFO sightings, with a general overview and only a few examples.

In the early '80s the number of sighting reports in Italy collapsed from over 600 to less than 100 per year. Indeed, in January 1983 we issued a press-release about the total number of 1982 reports being only 23 (the lowest number in 25 years)!

Such a situation was not typical of our country only: UFOs seemed to have disappeared from all over the world, at the time. Such a climate took Italian ufology to the a relevant crisis we have already told of.

Yet we have to add that - unlike most foreign countries - 1983 took the UFOs back to Italy, and since then we've been slowly regaining an acceptable situation. A real UFO wave arrived in 1985, when once again we had hundreds of sightings all over the nation. And since then we have returned to a situation similar to the mid- Sixties, with an average of 100 reported sightings per year, though far from the peaks of 300-600 yearly reports we had in the '70s.

A major difference from the previous decade is the smaller number of "good" cases. If we had to choose the major Italian reports in the '80s, we could find only a few: the greatest part of collected sightings are just low-definition nocturnal lights, often easy to identify. And even some promising close encounter cases revealed themselves to be IFOs after proper investigation. We think that it may be due to better investigators' capabilities in tracing even very complex solutions.

Now let's present some example of investigated reports, choosing them among the 80 close encounters which took place between 1980 and 1988.

On a night in June, 1982, a chicken breeder in Volpago (near Venice) was awakened at 4 a.m. by the sound of the temperature alarm system. He ran out and he found confronted by two red spirals turning in the air and a white beam coming from a dark object hovering above an electrical box. After a few minutes the beam disappeared and the dark object moved away. Only the shed that was nearest to the phenomenon had reported a temperature lower than 18 degrees.

• TRACE-LANDING CASES

On June 1st, 1985, a very odd ground mark was discovered in a field near Brescia: two opposite series of converging stripes were cut into the ground, and a greyish powder covered their perfect outline. They were eleven meters long and looked quite impressive. Newspapers' titles cried "Is ET a Giant Chicken?" and reported several local UFO reports in the previous and following days.

Our investigation was very instructive: chemical analysis of the collected samples showed the grey powder was nearly pure aluminium, which could have been extracted from the ground by oxido-reduction. Since the small Indian corn plants were un-damaged even within the traces, a complex discussion followed, and the final conclusion was that it could have been a lightning striking the area and discharging itself along the ground surface instead of penetrating it through a burned hole as usual. The release of a high quantity of energy within a short time and space could explain both the mechanical and the chemical effects onto the ground.

A more recent report was received on September 19, 1988 when an anonymous caller told the local newspaper that he had seen a fiery UFO take off from a field near Verona, and traces were left. Newsmen and policemen actually found three burned, blackened circles nearly 2 meters in diameter, forming a nearly perfect equilateral triangle in the grass, each side being 12 meters long. A strong vinegar smell was still present when we arrived investigating, two days later. Chemical analysis of the samples once again helped to find a solution: residual traces were found of highly combustible solvents, thus indicating somebody had "built" the traces by burning the grass within a circular "mask" full of such solvents.

• HUMANOID REPORTS

As of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, one of the best cases took place in 1984, at Prata Principato, near Naples. On the morning of October 9, an old peasant walking in the fields suddenly found himself confronted with an odd-looking entity: it was 4 feet tall and was entirely covered with long hair. It had a helmet on his head and a stick in his hand. The entity

got away by hovering without touching the ground and disappeared behind some bushes. A few seconds later, the witness saw a flying box with a dome rising up from behind the bushes. The police found several strange footprints on the spot, and six conical holes in two parallel lines on the ground where the object had taken off.

On the evening of April 14, 1985, several people in a small area around Aviano (Northeastern Italy) independently reported seeing a multi-colored bright object low in the sky. At 10 p.m. two fiancées were descending by car the slopes of Mount Cavallo when they suddenly met two human-like shapes standing beside the dark road in the woods. They were wearing a "space-suit" and had no visible arm. After running 100 meters forward, the car stopped by itself while a yellow mist enveloped them. After a few desperate attempts, they managed to start the motor again and leave, but after driving some hundred meters the car-stop and mist took place again. For the second time they got to re-start the car, but the motor stopped again after a few minutes and they could go on only because of the descending slope of the road, till they arrived down to the highway, where they could call for help. An interesting feature is that when they met the entities, they had just crossed a car coming the opposite direction. Local ufologists tried and found the driver of the second car, and he admitted he too had seen the entities and had some troubles with his motor.

• THE FLAPS

The most widely reported "UFOs" in the decade were probably the occasional "flaps", when hundreds of contemporary witnesses reported sighting something in the sky from a wide area: we usually get one big flap each year, though they are always due to known objects or phenomena.

As an example, on June 6th, 1983, at 11 p.m. a flying object was seen passing all over Italy by hundreds of people. It was cigar-shaped, dark in color and had a few lighted portholes. It rapidly moved out of view following an horizontal path, and was followed by a long, white trail which remained visible for several minutes. Though the newspapers unanimously called it a "fiery UFO", you would have easily recognized it as a bright meteor: a bolide. We collected a lot of angular data about the sightings, and could so determine its exact path and distance from the ground (several thousands meters, yet some witnesses reported it as low as 30 meters).

A completely different object was visible for several hours on Sunday morning, September 15th, 1985. Thousands of people could watch a white circular light from 6 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. as it hovered in the sky over Piedmont (the Northwestern region). Several photos were taken from different towns, and the most dramatic sighting was from a small airplane where a journalist and a cameraman of the national TV tried to chase the mystery UFO over Aosta. Several minutes of video footage were prominently shown on national TV evening news, causing quite a sensation. A spokesman of the Italian Air Force UFO Study Group was interviewed as saying they were to investigate the sightings. Indeed, it was only us, the ufologists, who went on the spots; talked with witnesses; collected sketches, photos and angular data; could determine by triangulation its exact position, height and dimensions; and finally positively identified it as a French weather balloon.

A third example of flap took place only four months ago: around 7.30 p.m. on March 21st, 1989. Once again, thousands of amazed people all over Northern Italy watched a sort of explosion in the western sky, then a bright object speeding up and a wide spiral-shape slowly falling back, illuminating the sky for nearly half an hour. Several pictures were taken. Newspapers, ufologists and the police were flooded with calls from people who were frightened by the UFO, or thought a nearby French nuclear central had exploded; pilots in flight even manoeuvred to avoid a collision with the object. Astronomers quickly explained it away as a very rare "aurora borealis" example; but the real answer was a military missile launch which actually took place at Biscarosse, France, on the Atlantic coast, nearly 1,000 kilometers away.

• SOME REFLECTIONS ON IFO REPORTS: STUDYING THE FLAPS

Our own experience with flaps took us to discriminate between two different kinds of IFOs. Those we may call "individual IFOs" and those we may call "collective IFOs".

The first ones are virtually independent from unusual aerial phenomena, and are often due to very common misidentification sources, like bright planets; they are more or less uniformly distributed in time and space, though they may be reported more frequently depending for example on media coverage.

On the contrary, the collective ones are characterized by a great number of witnesses in a rather large area who at the same time see approximately the same phenomenon, thus generating a flap.

While the greater attention of ufologists has frequently gone to the single misinterpretations, we feel that it's in the latter cases we may do a better homework, inasmuch we can collect a great number of testimonies referring to one event, and thus apply some statistical tools properly.

Here you may find one of the reasons why collecting and studying IFO reports is useful for ufology: it's usually simple to determine the average data (eg. time, shape, colors, path) for the lot of testimonies. So, as a first step, you may establish what was actually there (something you rarely can do with "individual" IFOs, and never with real UFOs), as we did for the 1985 weather balloon and the other flaps.

Yet more important is that you can compare such average (i.e. most probable) data with the "strangest" reports which usually are also collected. We mean those testimonies who describe a different appearance, or a different behavior, of the sighted phenomenon. Indeed the collected data for each considered parameter seem to be unevenly distributed: they usually follow a typical Gauss (bell-shaped) distribution, with most data at the average value, and lesser cases the further you go from such central value. In analyzing flaps we may "measure" how anomalous such data is with respect to the average, and we may determine how many reports are "anomalous".

The ufologist's classic attitude would have been to eliminate the average data (i.e. those presenting a lower strangeness) and to keep only the "strangest" ones, the marginal ones, isolating them from the context.

A typical example may be found in bolide flaps, where some ufologist admits it might have been just a north to south meteor at 8.45 p.m. but then "saves" the testimony of Mrs. X, because she allegedly saw an east to west trailed object at 9 o'clock.

A first conclusion we have drawn from studying our own flaps is concerning witnesses reliability.

The human witness has shown to be not so bad an instrument, after all: analyzing testimonies of known objects/phenomena, we found that they are usually rather accurate and correct in their descriptions of what they saw.

In a sense, we are re-valuing eye-witness testimony, after ten years of radical ufology criticising its reliability.

But it also follows that when there is actually something up there, people see it and report it correctly, at 90%. By a paradox, it also follows that we become more suspicious of unconfirmed "individual" sightings when nobody else in the area saw anything.

In these cases some subjective factors may be at work, as is shown in some Venus-generated IFOs. Another interpretation may be that such unconfirmed reports are just the same as the "marginal cases" we found in the flaps: one thousand people watched Venus that night, but only one saw it moving down and beaming a green mist upon him. The 999 didn't even think of reporting their "sighting" of a perfectly ordinary object, while that one did run to the local newspaper or ufologist. Unfortunately, in such cases we completely miss the greater part of the curve that we do have when it's an "unusual" sky phenomenon, and thus we are unable to put the "anomalous" report within its general context and recognize it as such.

• SOME REFLECTIONS ON UFOLOGY TODAY

We sometime hear foreign colleagues asking us why we bother so much about IFOs, instead of UFOs.

We would like to answer that the IFOs themselves are important and interesting. Not only because they are 9 out of 10 reported sightings, but mostly because it's only us ufologists who make the difference between IFOs and UFOs. Such distinction does not exist at public levels: the witnesses and the media.

Please consider the fact that, though not all UFOs are bright meteors, all bright meteors become UFOs in the newspapers next day, as well as in the mind of the greater part of their casual eyewitnesses.

And it is not only for meteors: it's also the case of weather balloons, satellite re-entries, some missile launches and a few other typical causes for sightings of unusual aerial phenomena.

Here a sort of inter-disciplinary competence is needed, and nobody seems to have such, if it's not us ufologists. We mentioned the recent example of astronomers suggesting an actual missile launch being just a meteorological phenomenon.

A strange consequence is that ufologist has become a sort of a general expert on sky phenomena. As such he's taken on a "social role". Ironically, that's something old ufologists have been fruitlessly trying to achieve, even if they were meaning it somewhat differently.

It's something totally new; it's something we weren't even looking for. For a lot of reasons we are left alone with this role because we are the only ones able to give some hopefully correct answers.

We don't know if UFOs are really "the mystery of the century" but surely that is a scientific no man's land (and often also an information no man's land). Maybe we are not the Galileos of a would- be new science of ufology, but surely we are covering an intellectual region nobody seems to care of.

Moreover we think IFO identifications are not merely a by-product of our activity. An intrinsic interest may be found in these which are unusual events anyway. They may be anomalous because of the physical, psychological or social conditions in which they take place; or even because of their own causes, that may be "anomalous". Ufologists produce a growth of knowledge about them, and that is positive, as well as it's positive to be able to solve at least part of the mystery.

For forty years, ufology has been meant to find the Final Answer to the UFO mystery. Quite a lot of frustration has followed, because of the unforeseen complexity of the subject.

Perhaps we should learn to accept that we may get partial answers. These may be intermediate stages towards a more general solution of the UFO problem. But they are answers, anyway, to however small problems and mysteries.

Maybe the final answer will not be what was expected, that is proof of alien intervention, or maybe it will be exactly that. But in the meantime we would have discovered a lot of facts and information previously unknown, as we already have, though we rarely admit it. Just think of the Earthlights debate for an example.

We do not mean to change ufology, but we think it's more realistic an attitude to view ufology as it actually is: a day by day work, that may take to day by day results, whatever they are.

Turin, july 1989

INFORMATION QUALITY: THE ITACAT EXAMPLE

Some Reflections on Close Encounters in Italy

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The catalogue of Italian close encounters has been taken as an example for a preliminary discussion about the quality of available documentation for present UFO cases. Even what everybody recognizes as the best phenomenology on record is founded on scarce and generally unreliable information. Some considerations are presented about the origins and the consequences of such a situation.

"ITACAT" is the acronym of "Italian Catalogue of Type-1 Reports", that is a comprehensive collection of all close encounter cases taken place in Italy. It has been started in 1977 along the trail of Peter Rogerson's INTCAT, the catalogue of international close encounters once published on MUFOB/MAGONIA and other national works as well. Material was collected by checking groups and investigators' archives, old listings of cases and the Italian UFO literature as a whole. The result was a first 400-page manuscript prepared in 1985: it has been published only last month due to the several problems in finding a cheap press style.

The ITACAT monograph published by Centro Italiano Studi Ufologici (C.I.S.U.) includes about 430 cases ranging 1912 through 1984. Beyond a long presentation of the whole work (where explanations about definitions and methodology were presented, as well as three complete bibliographies about catalogues and studies on close encounters) there is a first large section devoted to the abstracts of all collected cases and their main Italian and foreign sources. A second section refers to comments about the quality of each single case (that is further information about the source, the eventual investigation, the witness, etc.) and evaluation of possible explanations. Of course, most of such comments have been produced by a personal point of view, even though grounded on data and quite objective interpretations.

In the headline of each case you can read an attempt of evaluation about its quality and identification. I am completely aware this work is limited by one person's judgement, so it could be questionable. But, as in nearly all projects of such a kind, it wasn't possible to establish an actual panel of differently minded researchers to express a common evaluation. Particularly, I established some different evaluation labels which can be freely combined together. Each label has been processed in relation to the following definitions :

* **UNRELIABLE:** the source of the case is completely unreliable for a serious use of the case itself. To avoid this label it must have been investigated by balanced and expert investigators producing a comprehensive report. Anyway, a case not labelled as "unreliable" offers only a better information quality and doesn't mean that a really unexplained phenomenon actually has been seen by somebody.

* **SEEMINGLY UNEXPLAINED:** cases which seem to offer no well-known explanation to their reported phenomena and a high information quality. They are the best UFO cases on record, as regards ITACAT. I say "seemingly" because our experience is showing as a lot of strong cases could be explained after some time, thank to additional details and knowledges.

* **POSSIBLE EXPLANATION:** cases where available information allows to propose a possible explanation for the reported phenomena.

* **PROBABLE EXPLANATION:** cases which interpretation by conventional arguments is probable or even nearly sure. Unfortunately, alleged investigations don't offer those checks able to confirm suggested identifications.

As said before, ITACAT is a file of close encounters. But apart from the old general definition given by the late Dr. Hynek there is quite confusion about what one means for "close encounter". Many researchers proposed their own definition, so I could but propose mine!

The catalogue includes all cases which can be defined as follows :

"Any experience where the witness states the sighting of a phenomenon at less than 30 meters of altitude and associated to the common idea of UFO by himself or other people"

Sincerely I don't like the altitude limit inside this definition, but I accepted it as something like a "historical compatibility" with past works.

You can immediately realize that ITACAT is a great file of any kind of stories, all related to what commonly people refer as "UFO". You can find everything from simple rumours to detailed investigations reports, passing through an ocean of newsclippings. It's the usual problem: as we don't know what we are looking for, we have to consider everything. What's important is to label each of them accordingly.

The catalogue doesn't include the so-called fringe cases, most of which have an indirect relation with what we usually name "UFO phenomenon", that is a concept difficult to be defined. Bedroom visitors, lonely entities, traces without UFOs, telepathic contacts with presumed ET beings, contactee tales and so on have been separately filed, just because they

don't fit the second point of ITACAT's close encounter definition. Moreover, well-known hoaxes or very probable faked cases haven't been recorded in the file.

At present, I have collected nearly 500 cases which are so distributed:

50.8 %	C.E. 0	(without any effect)
15.2 %	C.E. 1	(temporaneous effects, like E.M. and physiological)
13.0 %	C.E. 2	(physical traces and other permanent effects)
19.5 %	C.E. 3	(entity cases)
1.5 %	C.E. 4	(abductions)

Please note that the percentages of C.E. 1 and C.E. 2 aren't exact as several cases concerning temporaneous effects or physical traces have been reported among the other higher rated classes. This is a great limit of most catalogues currently on record, including mine: as a consequence, we haven't a clear picture of the real distribution of the different kinds.

As you can see at first glance, the so-called "high-strangeness cases" count for about one third of the whole file. The quantity isn't so high and the quality as well. Abductions are a rare kind of experience in the Italian UFO scene: only five events, of which only one is relatively well documented.

A few comments on the yearly distribution too. As you can see by the enclosed transparency, the peak has been produced by the late '70s and particularly by 1978, rating more than 110 different close encounters. Such a record year was the production of a series of factors and situation we don't know exactly, even though we have some suspects:

- (1) a late effect of the "Close encounter of the third kind" movie.
- (2) the unusual coverage given by mass media to the re-entry of an artificial satellite which produced hundreds of sightings and some "mysterious" phenomena seen by fishermen in the Adriatic sea (phenomena recently attributed to activities related to oil research).
- (3) the special psycho-social situation of the Italian people (1978 was a black year due to the red terrorism and the massive press coverage to UFOs could have been an unconscious reaction to reduce the high tension of the time).
- (4) the top result of a special historical period (the '70s), when occult and mysterious matters were fashionable and practised by thousands of people.

Practically 1978 is the peak year of a longer wave, started in 1973 and ended in 1979. After that year, a new "dark age" got the Italian ufology: people interested in ufology decreased more and more and sightings became more and more less frequent, even though with some exceptions.

The second remarkable peak inside the yearly distribution of Italian close encounters is the 1954 one: it is the product of the big wave taken place in Italy in that year so special for the international UFO scene. But it is like a small island before the exceptional '70s. Seeing the next transparency (3-D GRAPH OF CLOSE ENCOUNTERS), it is interesting to remember that 1954 has the highest percentage of C.E. 3, 18 events of such a kind out of 39 recorded cases. This is quite strange and maybe it is just a special feature of that wave we should carefully consider. In the graph years have been plotted from left (1947) to right (1984), while in the X axis the rear position takes for C.E. 0.

Getting a quick look at the time distribution we have a further confirmation of the phenomenon's nightly attitude: this is not so strange if we remember that UFO cases come from visual observations and that witnesses' perception is easily distorted during the night. Moreover, darkness leads people to a special emotional and psychological state able to bias the witnesses' reporting abilities. Of course this is not the ultimate explanation for the clear majority of UFO stories in nightly hours, but only a simple consideration.

I wouldn't like to bore you with other comments about the well-known frequency distributions we are used to read about: all of us know them and their actual meaning. I am still quite skeptical about the value of such a kind of approach towards these very simple data and, generally, about all data originating from the tales we receive. If we want to study the very interesting phenomenon of the tales themselves (that is a psycho-sociological survey in order to understand why so many people are saying to see so strange things in the sky), we can trust all the collected data in spite of their sources. The tales would be the object of the study and they would be enough. But I'd like to approach my collection of cases in order to verify the eventual presence of something objective behind the pure tale of each witness or, better, try in understanding what they report to have seen. This ambitious aim absolutely needs to work with sure checked data, that is a good information quality.

This is a fundamental point of UFO research I would like to stress. It is not serious to analyze cases based on newsclippings and then process hypotheses or even simple conclusions about what you think to be behind the cases themselves. Unfortunately, most UFO stories we have just come from not checked sources: press, rumours, direct reports, news collected by UFO fans and so-called "investigations", enough to make Sherlock Holmes turn in his grave. We should always remember that a lot of our UFO culture has been founded on all these uncontrolled sources.

I think we should begin to consider a new actual parameter in the critical evaluation of the great mass of data we have: the quality of information. It is not possible to go on recognizing that well-investigated reports are only a small percentage of the whole documentation we have and then accept that same documentation as a basis of discussion for any kind of work. Unless we aim to a sociological survey of stories, which is not the main interest of most ufologists.

It is difficult to define the concept of information quality related to the special UFO case. I would like to argue only a few simple considerations, hoping that international researchers could establish a concrete set of features describing thoroughly the concept itself (a partial

attempt in such a direction was accomplished by our French friends, Michel Figuet particularly, inside the search for requirements able to define really "strong" cases). Anyway, I don't want to deceive myself, as I know how difficult is to propose standards to our colleagues and make them accepted.

First of all we must consider information quality as the result of an evaluation of how many and what data have been produced by the source and the nature of the source itself. It isn't so important the presence of a lot of detailed descriptive features about the appearance of the phenomenon sighted by the witness. It's also very important to know exactly this guy, the environment where the sighting took place, weather conditions and geographical coordinates. These are only examples of data every investigator needs to judge correctly a tale in order to evaluate its reliability and objectivity. I repeat once again: we could take it at face value in case of a survey about what men are saying to see in the skies, but we would like to know if they are actually seeing something real and what, if possible.

Certainly, there are remarkable problems in being able to get those information: investigator should ask the witness for embarrassing questions on his personal life, as well as to collect data requiring a hard search. Ufologists are generally dilettanti people who do what they are able to do, so we cannot humanely expect too much from their generous effort. This situation could explain the scarcity of basic data even in most investigation reports. This certainly explains the huge quantity of ITACAT cases labelled as "Insufficient Information" and "Unreliable".

We should always take in mind that such a loss of information produces two serious consequences at least :

- * a mis-knowledge or no knowledge at all about details able to stress eventual causes having produced the reported phenomena.

- * only the usual details concerning the witness' tale are collected, so you haven't elements to judge the whole case by a point of view other than a "simple" story.

The control over the source is another fundamental element for the information quality. Who is the producer of the case? A journalist ? The witness itself ? An unidentified rumour collected by somebody? A super-enthusiast young UFO fan? Or a skilled investigator? Who knows! I don't know even this detail for many Italian cases, as their available news are scarce and confused. The situation should be the same everywhere, but worse in countries where there aren't researchers able to recognize such a situation. Of course, the weights of a well-investigated case and a newsclipping-generated event are different. Beyond the quantity of data supplied by them, the alleged reliability does the difference. This doesn't mean that a ufologist is much more reliable than a journalist, but that the latter is prone to report the episode quickly and unseriously.

Sometimes I am asking myself how it has been possible to produce so much literature and theories on the ground of so many unchecked sources or rumours. I don't consider a hypothesis built on newsclippings to be serious. It seems a consequence of the power of the

myth and the wonderful dream of ET visitors! Unfortunately, this situation remains and myth is always feeding these far and uncontrolled information.

Beyond these very simple considerations, I would like to show some data produced by a quick analysis on the ITACAT sample. Let's start with the kind of available sources. Four of them have been considered for the analysis:

- * PRESS (newspapers and magazines)
- * INVESTIGATION (any kind of report produced by a ufologist or another person)
- * DIRECT REPORT (practically a tale directly supplied by the witness)
- * OTHERS (letters from other people, rumours, unreferenced books)

Several cases have different kinds of sources, for example both press and investigation: I have always taken the best one into consideration (generally the investigation, even though such a choice could be sometimes questionable).

Seeing the enclosed graph (KIND OF SOURCES) we may realize a lot of cases are just coming from ufologists: this doesn't actually mean that quality of this kind of source is better than the others. Most cases labelled in the investigation class have been reported in a terrible way, with few data and very short papers. A further selection between "good" and "bad" enquiries would be necessary, but it would produce some judgment problems and consequent reactions.

Anyway, it is clear how most available cases take origin from completely unchecked sources, without any real possibility to evaluate the alleged sighting tale correctly.

In the next graph (NUMBER OF SOURCES) the number of primary sources for each single case has been processed. We should expect the more different sources an event has, higher its information quality is. In fact, we could compare different approaches and maybe different data so to get a better look at the case. Unfortunately, more than 80% of the whole ITACAT file originates from one single source. Well-documented cases are a little fraction of the whole but they offer a quite good quality, as two out of the three or more sources are different investigations at least. Our attention should be caught just by such small group of cases.

I think the TIME OF SOURCE RELEASE (see enclosed graph) is another interesting parameter to evaluate the quality of our UFO documentation. The later is the date when the case was communicated to someone for the very first time the more probable is the loss or unconscious change of the witness' memories. It is clear that an interview about the description of whatever visual event taken a long time lapse since its occurrence can't supply reliable information. The time of source release may so suggest us a first rough indication about the reliability of our collected cases. More than half ITACAT entries have been released after one month or more their actual occurrence: this means that more than half ITACAT entries can't be taken into serious consideration, as they ground on not "fresh" tales.

Parallely, we may look at the next graph (CASES AND SOURCES), where the dates of cases' occurrences have been compared with dates of release of their sources. It's evident how most sources have been located after 1972. That's not casual. As said before, the '70s caused a great interest for ufology among the people (the youth, especially) and the natural consequence was the production of a huge amount of UFO cases. Then we must remark that Italian ufology was practically born in the early seventies, when there was a great diffusion of local groups all over the country. Then, around 1978, the national Italian group founded in 1966 actually got a national size, coordinating all activities and promoting serious investigations. In the fifties and sixties, the Italian UFO scene was featured by few enthusiasts and some small groups: strangely the first real investigation was carried out in 1966 and enquiry activity became common only after 1972. This could help us in explaining the remarkable difference between cases' occurrence and source release. Moreover, we have a clear demonstration of the proportional link between people and mass media's interest in the matter and the number of disclosed UFO cases.

A last graph must be devoted to the survey of evaluations given to ITACAT events. I repeat they are personal evaluations developed on the ground of two main groups of parameters:

- * the quantity and, above all, quality of available documentations at moment of the analysis (later information could change or enhance the evaluation itself).

- * suggested interpretations about the reported phenomena, if available data allowed it.

The consequent results aren't advisable for true believers being weak in the heart. Maybe I really was too bad in my judgements, but I actually tried to think like a researcher before the available evidence. The picture coming out from such a survey is really depressing: four fifths of the whole file has few and unreliable information. This means that most cases have grounded on newsclippings, rumours, low quality investigations, direct reports and so on. Data are so scarce and unchecked that no serious attempt of interpretation about the alleged unusual phenomena can be accomplished. What about the remaining part? Another 3.2% has insufficient details, but hypothetical explanations were suggested all the same. Nearly 5% offer enough details, but it is completely unreliable, while 8% of cases could be hoaxes. Well, we remain just a little bit less than 1% of Apparently Unexplained cases. Maybe an evaluation accomplished by a guy less drastic than myself could lead to some more cases, but I think the final global result were just the same.

Really good trustworthy reports are very few, due to a series of problems related both to ufologists and the myth itself. The UFO lore allows and make easier the development of unchecked sources, because what they report belongs to that same universe of stereotyped motifs and expectations producing the mythology. As a consequence, UFO myth increases more and more its own power thanks to rumours and low-quality information. So the circle closes on itself. We could question if the myth development is a negative thing, but this will need an in-depth discussion. Maybe, we would prefer to study high-quality reports, offering excellent documentation and description of seemingly unexplained phenomena. This would be a

search towards the supposed physical component of UFO phenomenon. There are two problems:

- (1) the selection and the small quantity of resulting incidents
- (2) what to do

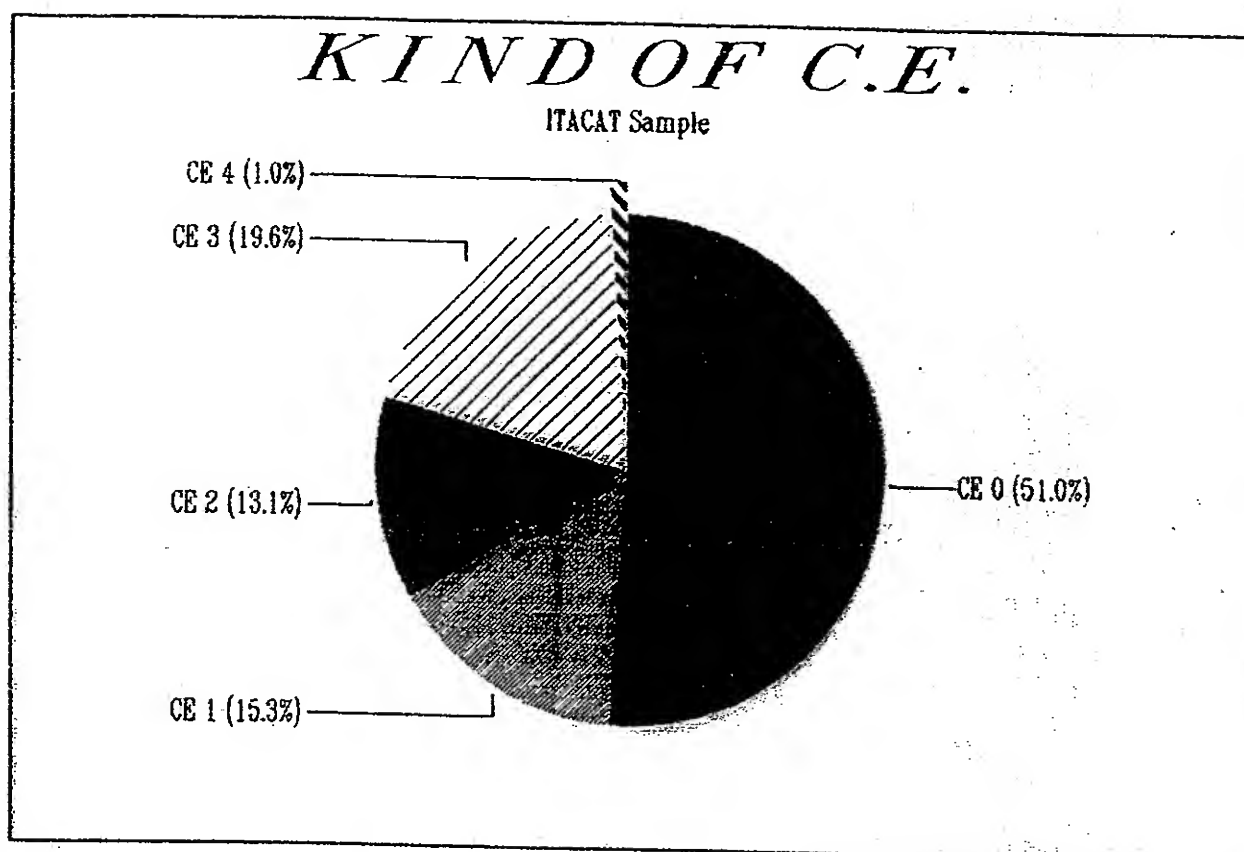
As the ITACAT sample showed, the sample of "perfect" cases able to justify the search for an original stimulus (whatever its origin could be) behind the witness tales is reduced. Much more all of us have been using to believe. What is the cause ? Misknowledge or a secret wish to avoid stopping our interest in ufology?

Please consider what I am saying as some free provocative considerations coming out from a critical survey of a sample of UFO phenomenology.

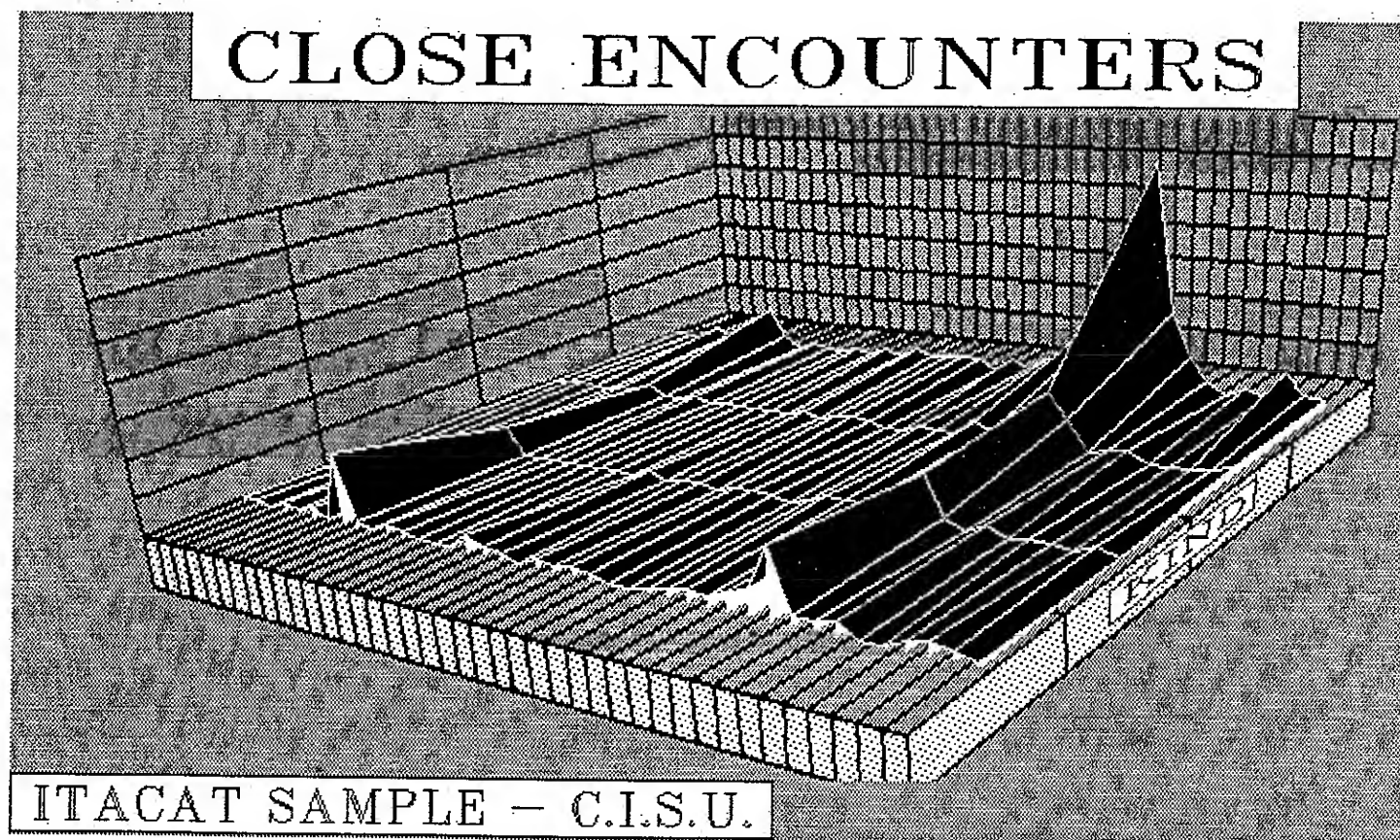
What's important is a thoroughly reflection about the quality of information we deal with. We must try to define a meaning for the term "quality" and establish a set of standards. Of course this won't solve the problem at all. We must ask ourselves if ufologists, that is some enthusiasts, will be never able to reach those standards. Certainly, we could improve the investigator's training and knowledges, but a lot of other limits will remain. But I prefer don't be worried: sometimes it is better to avoid some questions to enjoy with ufology.

At last, two final considerations. Firstly, a bad information quality doesn't necessarily mean that all cases are hoaxes or have a sure explanation. Ufologists' dilettantism and the omnipresent myth let cases to be reported in an uncompleted or even wrong way, but more witnesses actually refer interesting genuine sightings of what they think to be anomalous aerial phenomena. Secondly, most UFO cases are only supported by rumours and hardly reliable sources. There is a lot of noise produced by somebody, that is people who speak about something: this doesn't necessarily involve the presence of a truly strange objective phenomenon. On the contrary, it surely means that we have a social phenomenon. A phenomenon about which we only have tales.

The search for a serious quality information can surely help us in finding a truly scientific dimension for our studies. Without a checked concrete base we cannot do anything, only enjoy ourselves.



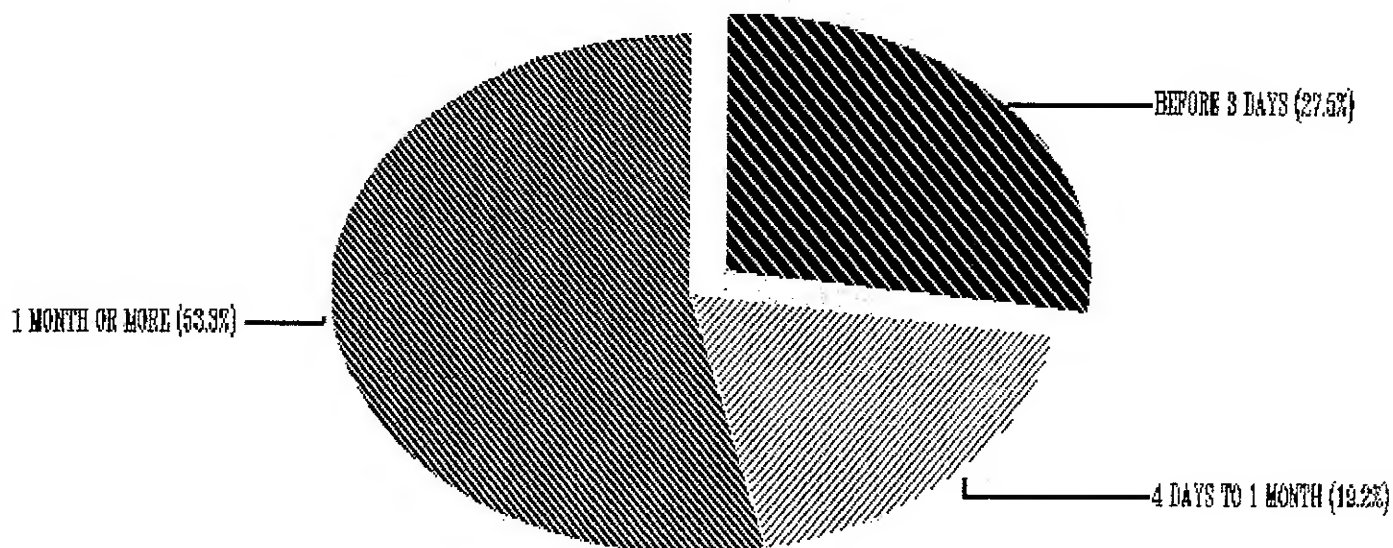
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YEARLY DISTRIBUTION

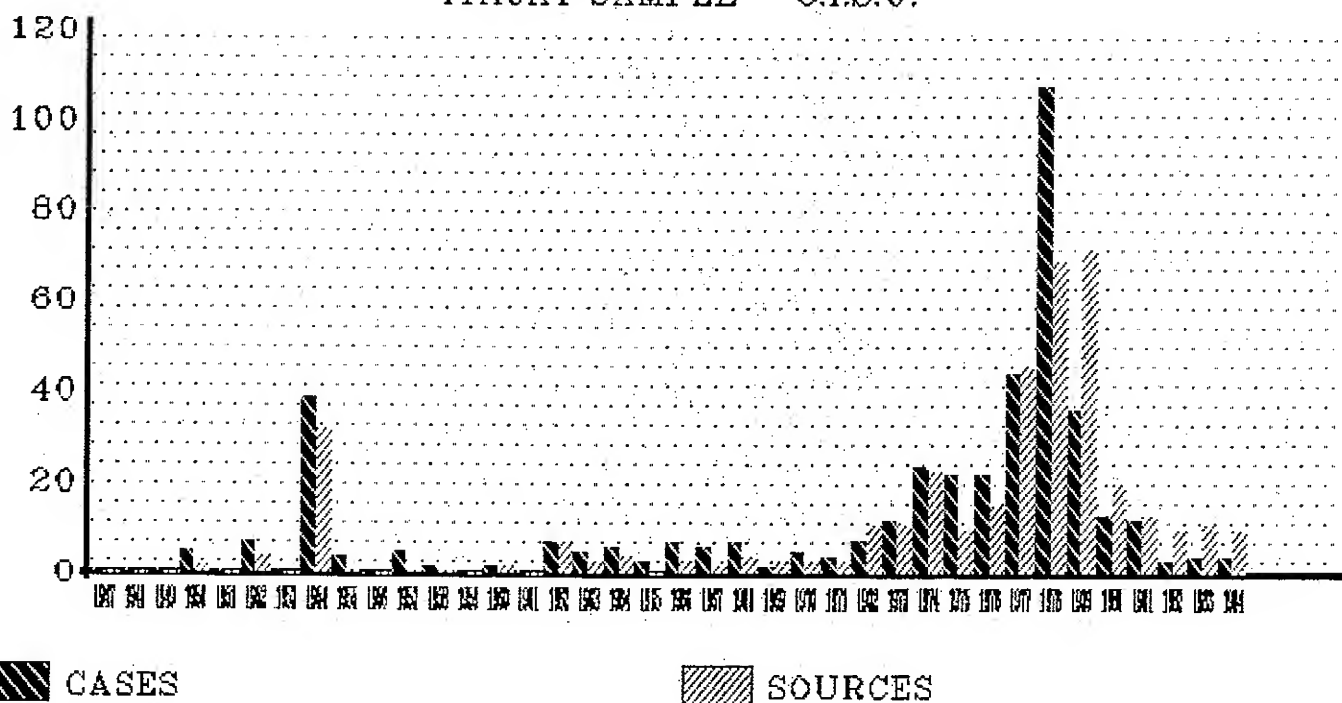
TIME OF SOURCE RELEASE

ITACAT Sample



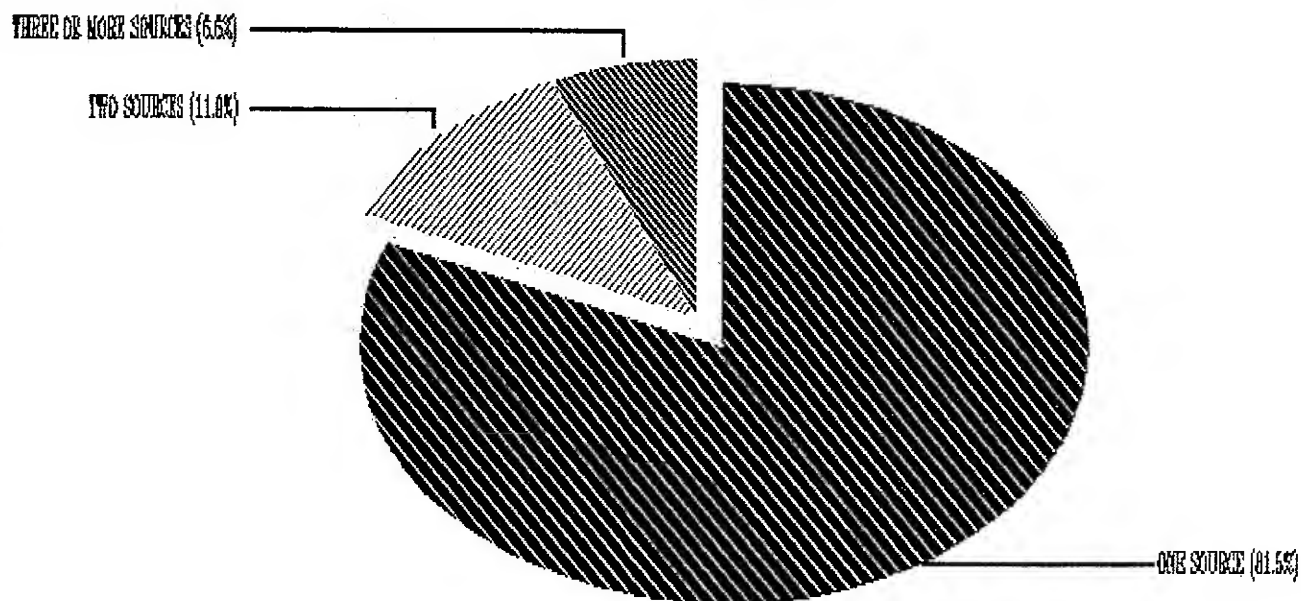
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ITACAT SAMPLE - C.I.S.U.



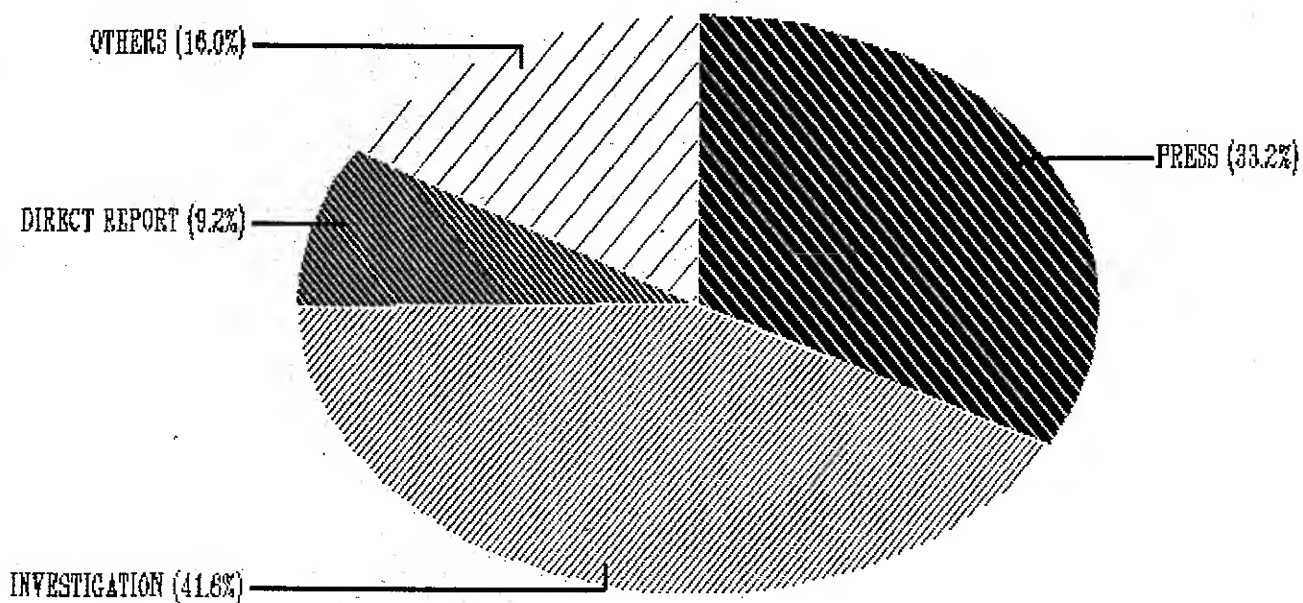
NUMBER OF SOURCES

ITACAT Sample



KIND OF SOURCES

ITACAT Sample



EVALUATION OF CASES

ITACAT Sample

